

Conscientious workers face exhaustion, shows research

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Going the extra mile at work leads to emotional exhaustion and work-family conflict. Credit: University of Bath

Being conscientious at work has long been linked with career success but

new University research shows that going above and beyond the call of duty comes at a cost to personal well-being and family responsibilities.

Going the extra mile

The study of [employees](#) in a UK customer call centre for a retail bank found that going the extra mile at work left employees emotionally exhausted and grappling with work-family conflict.

The side effects of conscientiousness were more striking where employees were already doing well at work. These employees were faced with sustaining high performance alongside the extra tasks and responsibilities that their managers were more likely to delegate to them because of their hard-working and dependable nature.

Feeling emotionally drained

Employees in the study, by the University's School of Management and King's College London, reported that they felt emotionally drained and "used up" because of their work and were struggling with balancing [family life](#) alongside work.

Increasing competitive pressures are pushing employers, particularly in customer service environments, to look for ways to improve organisational performance and this typically involves urging employees to be 'good citizens' by going the extra mile.

As well as improving the performance of the team and organisation it puts employees in good stead with managers for decisions on performance ratings, promotion, training and pay. Little has been known about the effect of this perceived 'win-win' on personal and family life.

The researchers studied a number of types of behaviour that could impact on employee well-being including helping colleagues at work and striving to avoid [work](#) conflict, but conscientiousness was seen to be more time-consuming and therefore have a greater impact.

When burnout hits

Dr Bruce Rayton, from our School of Management, said: "Conscientious workers typically don't want to let down their employers or customers down. They throw themselves into their job, consistently making an extra effort, to the extent that when they get home at the end of the day they feel physically and emotionally exhausted. Essentially they're experiencing a type of burnout, and that's damaging to health and well-being, and family life."

The danger of short term gains

Professor Stephen Deery, from King's College London's School of Management & Business, who led the research, said: "At the moment individuals are faced with balancing the benefits of a better appraisal against the cost to health and family time. Companies that are designing people management policies need to ensure that the short term gains made by encouraging employees to go the extra mile are not outweighed in the longer term by the personal costs of this behaviour."

The researchers studied a final sample of 79 employees through surveys completed by call centre supervisors and [customer service](#) agents.

More information: Stephen Deery et al. The Costs of Exhibiting Organizational Citizenship Behavior, *Human Resource Management* (2016). [DOI: 10.1002/hrm.21815](https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.21815)

Provided by University of Bath

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